

The Rise of Agreement; the Case of Persian Enclitics

Mohammad Rasekh Mahand 1[†]

¹ Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran.

Abstract. Traditionally, it was supposed that Persian pronominal enclitics act as pronouns or real arguments, while this paper tries to indicate that they act as agreement markers in some contexts, too. As historically they have moved from Wackernagel's position toward verb adjacent positions, their functions have also changed. Now, they are used as subject agreement markers in a group of Persian structures. It is argued that they have acquired this new role, subject agreement markers, via grammaticalization, and Blocking Principle, as envisaged by Fuß (2005) could explain this process.

Keywords: pronominal enclitics, agreement markers, grammaticalization, Blocking Principle.

1. Enclitics and their distribution

While there is a vast literature on clitics, especially in Romance languages (Anderson 2005, De Cat 2007), Persian pronominal enclitics are not treated appropriately. Modern Persian, an Iranian language, is a pro-drop, verb-final language. Inflectional suffixes appear on the verb to mark subject-verb agreement and they agree with the subject in person and number and license *pro*-drop in subject position. The subject agreement marker in 3Sg Past is nil. Persian has some pronominal enclitics, too, (=m, 1Sg; =t, 2Sg; =š, 3Sg; =mân, 1Pl; =tân 2Pl; =šân, 3Pl). These enclitics appear in five different positions, which could be divided into two main groups, verbal distributions and non-verbal ones. In verbal positions, the enclitics appear pre-verbally, as in (I); or post-verbally, as in (II). The main purpose of this paper is the study of enclitics in the first verbal position.

I. These enclitics appear pre-verbally in some structures. As the following examples show, in these structures, the subject agreement marker on the verb is a default / zero morph in the past tense third singular subjects, while the presence of an enclitic is obligatory.

- (1) a. *xoš=am* *'āmad-Ø*.
Like-Enc 1Sg come Past -3Sg Su
Lit: "I like it."
b. *xāb=aš* *bord-Ø*
sleep-Enc3Sg take Past -3Sg Su
Lit: "S/he slept."

II. The enclitics could also be used post-verbally, after inflectional suffixes used as subject markers. As the feature of special enclitics, these pronominal enclitics have a different syntax compared with their corresponding free forms. The free forms of objects appear canonically pre-verbally (as in 2 b, c), while their cliticized forms appear post-verbally (as in 2a). In this usage, these enclitics could be used without the co-referring direct objects (2a), or co-occur with them (2b&c).

- (2) a. *(man) did-am=eš*
(I) see Past-1Sg Su-Enc 3Sg
"I saw him/her."
b. *(man) Ali rā did-am=eš*
(I) Ali-RA see Past-1Sg Su-Enc 3Sg
"I saw Ali."

[†] Tel.: + 988118248303; fax: +988118292570.
E-mail address: rasekh@basu.ac.ir

c. (man) 'u rā did-am=eš

(I) s/he-RA see Past-1Sg Su-Enc 3Sg

"I saw him/her."

My main goal in this paper is to provide evidence that enclitics are acting as grammatical agreement markers in (I). The position of enclitics (Klavans 1985) in Old and Middle Persian was in Wackernagel's (1892) position, i.e. they occupied the second position in the sentence (Harris and Campbell 1995:28), but they are, in most positions, attracted to the head in Modern Persian.

2. Subject agreement markers

In part (1), it was noted that Persian pronominal enclitics appear in some special structures (I), in which they are not optional. These constructions are classed as impersonal in Persian linguistics literature (Ghomeshi 1996) and Sedighi (2005) calls them psychological constructions which always denote a physiological/mental/physical state of the experience. In these sentences a noun phrase (NP) could optionally appear in sentence initial/subject position which does not induce usual agreement on the verb with inflectional suffixes marking subject agreement. When the NP in sentence initial position is present, it is always co-referential with an enclitic attached to the non-verbal constituent of a compound verb. The verbs in these constructions always appear in third person singular/default form giving the impression that agreement is not obtained. They are also limited to a number of verbs such as; *gereftan* (to take), *âmadan* (to come), *bordan* (to take), *šodan* (to become), *zadan* (to hit) and *raftan* (to go). These verbs always denote a non-agentive event. The agreement system in this case is defective and I argue that the enclitics are grammaticalized to repair this defective agreement paradigm, in line with Fuß (2005:230) who states vividly that "new verbal agreement morphology arises only for those slots of the agreement paradigm where the existing verbal inflection is non-distinctive". The important point for our discussion is that the enclitic pronouns in these constructions are obligatory, and obligatorily co-referential with the optional sentence subjects. I argue below that in these structures, the enclitics act as agreement markers.

As Corbett (2003) shows agreement markers may co-occur with an NP argument, while clitics are arguments by themselves. We need a set of syntactic and morphological criteria to decide whether the enclitics in this position have already developed into some form of agreement or should rather be analyzed as a clitic pronoun. Fuß (2005:130) argues that "genuine agreement markers may co-occur with a determiner phrase (DP) argument, while clitics and incorporated pronouns are arguments by themselves and may therefore not co-occur with an argument that receives the same θ -role". For example in Italian, the inflected verb alone can create a well-formed sentence, or the subject can be optionally realized. Linguists took this to indicate that in Italian, the person/number marker is a true agreement suffix, which redundantly marks the person/number features of the subject (Fuß 2005:131). On the other hand, in Macushi, while the inflected verb alone can make a well-formed sentence, the person/number markers disappear in the presence of overt NP arguments, and their co-occurrence leads to ungrammaticality. So the person/number markers in Macushi are not agreement markers, "but rather clitic pronouns that have argument status and receive a theta-role from the verb" (Fuß 2005:131). The Persian examples in (1) are similar to the Italian. As those examples show, they are grammatical without the overt realization of the subject NP. At the same time, the person/number markers do not disappear in the presence of an overt NP, and they co-occur with the overt subject, as in (3).

(3) a. *man xoš=am* *'āmad-Ø*.

I Like-Enc 1Sg come Past -3Sg Su

Lit: "I like it"

b. *Ali xāb=eš* *bord-Ø*

Ali sleep-Enc3Sg take Past -3Sg Su

Lit: "Ali slept"

Fuß (2005) introduces some syntactic preconditions for the rise of agreement from pronominal elements. The first precondition is that agreement morphemes do not head their own projection in the syntax and they

occur on other functional heads, and the second one is that “agreement morphemes may combine with contentful functional categories such as C, T, or v (and maybe others) in one of the following ways. First, the agreement morpheme may attach to its functional host prior to the insertion of that host into the syntactic derivation. Second, the agreement morpheme may be added post-syntactically as a dissociated Agr-morpheme, as in the case of complementizer agreement in Germanic” (Fuß 2005:139). These preconditions do not put any restriction on the reanalysis of Persian enclitics as agreement markers in compound verbs of experience. Since agreement morphemes do not occupy a definite structural position in clause, they have come into existence as part of another element, namely subject clitics. The third and fourth preconditions led to the adjacency requirement, defined by Fuß (2005:140) as follows:

(4) *Adjacency requirement*

A clitic pronoun can be reanalyzed as a bound agreement affix on the verb only if the clitic is string-adjacent to the verb.

This precondition states that for a clitic pronoun to be reinterpreted as an inflectional affix, it should be adjacent to the verb. This restriction is met in Persian, since the enclitic is attached to the pre-verbal element of the compound verb. The adjacency requirement says that “a pronominal clitic can only be reanalyzed as an agreement morpheme on a functional head X if X combines with the verb prior to Vocabulary Insertion” (Fuß 2005:140). The presence of the finite verb in Persian compound verbs of experience signals that there should be agreement features, and the suitable morpheme to do that is the clitic adjacent to the verb, reanalyzed as agreement marker.

Fuß (2005:141) also argues that “the reanalysis of a pronoun as an agreement marker must preserve the predicate’s argument structure”. It means that according to θ -theory, since pronouns carry a θ -role, the role should be assigned when the pronoun is acting as agreement marker. This thematic role in Persian can be assigned to the initial experiencer when present, or to the *pro*. Fuß continues that pro-drop grammar facilitates the reanalysis of pronouns as agreement markers, and Persian is not an exception to this claim. So, it could be concluded that since the usual suffixes marking subject agreement are not at work in these structures, the clitics are reanalyzed and act as agreement markers.

There is another structure in Persian which supports that clitics have acquired the agreement role. As stated, the subject agreement marker in third singular past tense is nil. Interestingly, Persian speakers use the clitic, =eš, compensating the absence of subject agreement marker. This usage of =eš is a new trend, absent in careful speech and writing, suggesting speakers are using it as subject agreement markers. This =eš is used with intransitive predicates, emphasizing its non-argument nature (5).

(5) *Ali raft=eš*

Ali went-3Sg Enc.

‘Ali went’

If we look at morphological aspects of the rise of this new agreement suffix in Persian, it becomes clear that the grammaticalization of 3sg clitic =eš repairs the verbal agreement paradigm. Prior to this development, the verbal agreement paradigm had no phonological form for 3Sg in past tense, and the grammaticalization of enclitic has repaired this ‘defect’ of the paradigm. Table 1 shows the relevant facts:

Person & Number	Old paradigm	New paradigm
1sg	-am	-am
2sg	-i	-i
3sg	- Ø	-eš
1pl	-im	-im
2pl	-id	-id
3pl	-and	-and

Table 1. Verbal agreement paradigm's change in Persian

It could be concluded that the paradigm change repaired a previously defective agreement paradigm. Fuß (2005:22) asserts that "this observation is a general characteristic of the grammaticalization of agreement markers across languages". The introduction of new agreement markers is not random, but rule-governed. They appear where there is a defect and the existing paradigm is non-distinctive. Similar observations are made in other languages (see Fuß (2005) for a complete discussion).

The grammaticalization of enclitics to subject agreement markers in these two instances, examples (1) on one hand and example (5) on the other hand, could be explained by *Blocking Principle*, defined by Fuß (2005:233). This principle explains why Persian speakers are using clitics instead of grammatical markers in the discussed examples, where the existing agreement system is not distinctive enough. There is a slot in the old paradigm in table (1), and the Blocking Principle is fulfilled, since the development of a new marker has affected the underspecified cell. In the old paradigm, -Ø is a default agreement ending and represents the elsewhere case. The reanalysis of -eš as agreement marker, which is specified for person (3rd) and number (Sg), resolves the defective paradigm, leading to a more specified one. (See Fuß (2005) for similar facts in Bavarian). In both mentioned sentence types, Persian subject enclitics are obligatory whenever the verbal forms lack subject agreement features.

3. From clitics to agreement markers

Many linguists have talked about the grammaticalization of clitics into agreement markers. Anderson (2005:83) proposes that clitics are phrasal affixes and they are overt morphological markers of the morpho-syntactic properties of phrases. He (Ibid: chapter 8) discusses pronominal clitics as agreement markers and regards pronominal clitics as forms of agreement, differing from verbal agreement only in whether the functional content is realized as the morphology of a phrase or a word. The development of agreement markers is a very common kind of grammaticalization (Roberts and Roussou 2003:175). In Indo-European verb, the personal endings are derived from pronouns (Szemerényi 1996). Fuß (2005) is concerned with the diachronic development of subject-verb agreement from pronominal clitics. He observes that "cross-linguistically, the grammaticalization process under discussion either establishes agreement in languages that previously lacked agreement or serves to repair a defective paradigm" (Fuß 2005:1). There is a grammaticalization path in which the agreement markers are developed historically from free pronouns, as sketched below (Fuß 2005:4):

(6) Independent pronoun → weak pronoun → clitic pronoun → affixal (agglutinative) agreement marker → fused agreement marker → Ø

Persian clitics are repairing a defective paradigm. The Persian data in this paper show that currently the clitic pronouns, while preserving their original status in some distributions, have developed into agreement markers in a specific context, discussed in section (2) above. Persian instance is an ongoing process of reanalysis of clitics as agreement markers.

This observation shows that the change from clitics to agreement markers does not replace existing agreement markers in a random fashion. "Rather, it can be shown that the creation of new forms affects only those cells of the paradigm where the existing verbal agreement morphology is not distinctive" (Fuß 2005:229). It means that in Persian, clitics turn into obligatory markers of verbal agreement only in some specific structures, and they are optional in other contexts. Clitics are obligatory only in contexts where the existing agreement morphology fails to signal person and number of the subject in a clear way. This grammaticalization is shaped by *Blocking Principle* (Fuß 2005:233), operating during language acquisition and requiring new inflectional material to be more distinctive than the previous relevant inflectional formatives.

7) *Blocking Principle*

If several appropriate PF-realizations of a given morpheme are attested in the Primary Linguistic Data, the form matching the greatest subset of the morphosyntactic features included in the morpheme must be chosen for storage in the lexicon.

Fuß (2005) takes it to be a cognitive economy principle applying during language acquisition and guaranteeing an optimal and non-redundant lexicon. According to it, more specific, that is more marked lexical entries are preferred over less marked ones. It could be concluded that languages acquire new verbal agreement formatives only for the non-distinctive slots of the agreement paradigm (cf. Fuß 2005 for discussion and references). Blocking Principle is an economy principle, shaping the acquisition of inflectional morphology, which explains that clitics are acting as agreement markers whenever needed, in underspecified slots of the agreement paradigm.

In Persian examples discussed in section (2), two forms are competing: the empty morph used as default agreement marker, and the clitics. Both of them are able to mark the agreement, but the more specified one is clitic. In line with Fuß (2005:231), new verbal agreement morphology is acquired by morphological blocking effects. These obligatory clitics have in fact developed into verbal agreement markers, and these grammaticalized agreement markers compensate for the loss of distinctive agreement endings, in line with the Blocking Principle.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I tried to demonstrate that Persian enclitics are fulfilling two different functions, when appearing in verb-adjacent positions. These are called subject and object markers. By using different morphological and syntactic criteria, it was concluded that Persian subject enclitics, which obligatorily appear in specific structures, have developed into agreement markers. They are the result of grammaticalization of enclitics into agreement markers, and this process could be explained by Blocking Principle.

References

- [1] Anderson, S. R. Aspects of the theory of clitics. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press. 2005.
- [2] Corbett, G. Agreement: The range of the phenomenon and the principles of the Surrey Database of Agreement. Transactions of the Philological Society. 2003. **101** (2), 155–202.
- [3] De Cat, C. French dislocation; interpretation, syntax and acquisition. Oxford University Press. 2007.
- [4] Fuß, E. The rise of agreement, a formal approach to the syntax and grammaticalization of verbal inflection. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publication Company. 2005.
- [5] Ghomeshi, J. Projection and Inflection: a study of Persian phrase structure. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto. 1996.
- [6] Harris, A.C., and Campbell, L. Historical syntax in cross-linguistic perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995.
- [7] Klavans, J.L. The Independence of Syntax and Phonology in Cliticization. 1985. *Language* 61: 95 -120.
- [8] Roberts, I., & A. Roussou. Syntactic Change. A Minimalist Approach to Grammaticalization. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.
- [9] Sedighi, A. Subject-predicate agreement restrictions in Persian. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa. 2005.
- [10] Szemerényi, O. Introduction to Indo-European Linguistics, Oxford University Press. 1996.
- [11] Wackernagel, J. Über ein Gesetz der Indo-Germanischen Wortstellung. *Indogermanische Forschungen*. 1892. 1: 333 - 436.